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THE STAFF AND SCRIP.

"How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle-hat and staff
And his sandal-shoon."

"Who owns these lands?" the Pilgrim said.
"Stranger, Queen Blanchelys."
"And who has thus harried them?" he said.
"It was Duke Luke did this:
God's ban be his!"

The Pilgrim said: "Where is your house?
I'll rest there, with your will."
"Ye've but to climb these blacken'd boughs,
And ye'll see it over the hill,
For it burns still."

"Which road, to seek your Queen?" said he.
"Nay, nay, but with some wound
Thou'lt fly back hither, it may be,
And by thy blood! the ground
My place be found."

"Friend, stay in peace. God keep thy head,
And mine, where I will go;
For He is here and there," he said.
He pass'd the hillside slow,
And stood below.

The Queen sat idle by her loom.
She heard the arras stir,
And look'd up sadly. Through the room
The sweetness sicken'd her
Of musk and myrrh.

Her women, standing two and two,
In silence comb'd the fleece.
The Pilgrim said, "Peace be with you,
Lady;" and bent his knees.
She answered, "Peace."

Her eyes were like the wave within;
Like water-reeds the poise
Of her soft body, dainty thin;
And like the water's noise
Her plaintive voice.

For him, the stream had never well'd
In desert tracts malign
So sweet; nor had he ever felt
So faint in the sunshine
Of Palestine.

Right so, he knew that he saw weep,
Each night throughout some dream,
The Queen's own face, confused in sleep
With visages supreme
Not known to him.

"Lady," he said, "your lands lie burnt
And waste. To meet your foe
All fear. This I have seen and learnt.
Say that it shall be so,
And I will go."

She gazed at him. "Your cause is just,
For I have heard the same."
He said: "God's strength shall be my trust.
Fall it to good or grame,
'Tis in His Name."

"Sir, you are thank'd. My cause is dead.
Why should you toil to break
A grave, and fall therein?" she said.
He did not pause but spake:
"For my vow's sake."

"Can such vows be, Sir—to God's ear,
Not to God's will?" "My vow
Remains. God heard me there as here,"
He said with reverent bow,
"Both then and now."

They gazed together, he and she,
The minute while they spoke;
And when he ceased, she suddenly
Look'd round upon her folk
As though she woke.

"Fight, Sir," she said, "my prayers in pain
Shall be your fellowship."
He whisper'd one among her train,
"To-night Thou'lt bid her keep
This staff and scrip."

She sent him a sharp sword, whose belt
About his body there
As sweet as her own arms he felt.
He kiss'd its blade, all bare,
Instead of her.

She sent him a green banner wrought
With one white lily stem,
To bind his lance with when he fought.
He writ beneath the same
And kiss'd her name.

She sent him a white shield, whereon
She bade that he should trace
His will. He blent fair hues that shone,
And in a golden space
He kissed her face.

So, arming, through his soul there pass'd
Thoughts of all depth and height:
But more than other things at last
Seem'd to the armed knight
The joy to fight.

The skies, by sunset all unseal'd,
Long lands he never knew,
Beyond to-morrow's battle-field
Lay open out of view
To ride into.

Next day till dark the women pray'd:
Nor any might know there
How the fight went. The Queen has bade
That there do come to her
No messenger.

Weak now to them the voice o' the priest
As any trance affords;
And when each anthem fail'd and ceased,
It seem'd that the last chords
Still sang the words.

"Oh, what is the light that shines so red?
'Tis long since the sun set."
Quoth the youngest to the eldest maid:
"Twas dim but now, and yet
The light is great."

Quoth the other: "'Tis our sight is dazed
That we see flame i' the air."
But the Queen held her eyes and gazed,
And said, "It is the glare
Of torches there."

"Oh what are the sounds that rise and spread?
All day it was so still;"
Quoth the youngest to the eldest maid;
"Unto the furthest hill
The air they fill."

Quoth the other: "'Tis our sense is blurr'd
With all the chaunts gone by."
But the Queen held her brows and heard,
And said, "It is the cry
Of Victory."

The first of all the rout was sound,
The next were dust and flame,
And then the horses shook the ground:
And in the thick of them
A still band came.

"Oh, what do ye bring out of the fight,
Thus hid beneath these boughs?"
"One that shall be thy guest to-night,
And yet shall not carouse,
Queen, in thy house."

"Uncover ye his face," she said.
"Oh, changed in little space!"
She cried, "Oh, pale that was so red!
O God, O God of grace!
Cover his face."

His sword was broken in his hand
Where he had kiss'd the blade.
"Oh, soft steel that could not withstand!
Oh, harder heart unstay'd,
That pray'd and pray'd!"

His bloodied banner cross'd his mouth
Where he had kissed her name.
"O East, and West, and North, and South.
Fair flew these folds, for shame,
To guide Death's aim!"

The tints were shredded from his shield
Where he had kiss'd her face.
"Oh, of all gifts that I could yield,
Death only keeps its place,
My gift and grace!"

Then stepp'd a damsel to her side,
And spake, and needs must weep;
"For his sake, Lady, if he died
He pray'd of thee to keep
This staff and scrip."

That night they hung above her bed
Till morning, wet with tears.
Year after year above her head
Her bed his token wears,
Five years, ten years.

That night the passion of her grief
Shook them as there they hung.
Each year the wind that shed the leaf
Shook them, and in its tongue
A message flung.

And she would wake with a clear mind
That letters writ to calm
Her soul lay in the scrip; and find
Pink shells, a torpid balm,
And dust of palm.

They shook far off with palace sport
When joust and dance were rife;
And the hunt shook them from the court;
For hers, in peace or strife,
Was a Queen's life.

A Queen's death now: as now they shake.
To chaunts in chapel dim;
Hung where she sleeps, not seen to wake,
(Carved lovely white and slim),
With them, by him.

Stand up to-day, still arm'd, with her,
Good knight, before His brow
Who then as now was here and there.
Who had in mind thy vow
Then even as now.

The lists are set in Heaven to-day,
The bright pavilions shine;
Fair hangs thy shield, and none gainsay;
The trumpets sound in sign
That she is thine.

Not tithed with days' and years' deacease
He pays thy wage He owed,
But in light stalls of golden peace,
Here in his own abode,
Thy jealous God.

NEVER is Piety more unwise than when she casts Beauty out of the church, and by this excommunication forces her fairest sister to become profane. It is the duty of religion not to eject, but to cherish and seek fellowship with every beautiful exhibition which delights, and every delicate art which embellishes human life. So, on the other hand, it is the duty of Art not to waste its high capabilities in the imitation of what is trivial, and in the curious adornment of what has only a finite significance. The highest Art is always the most religious; and the greatest artist is always a devout man. A scoffing Raphael or Michael Angelo is not conceivable.—J. S. Blackie.